

Southeast Regional Office
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St. Petersburg, FL 33702
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August 4, 2000

Dear Permit Holder:

IF YOU FISH FOR BLUEFISH IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION, YOU MUST OBTAIN THE APPROPRIATE PERMITS AS DESCRIBED BELOW FROM THE NORTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE OF NMFS. THE PERMITS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES DESCRIBED BELOW DO NOT APPLY TO GULF OF MEXICO BLUEFISH.

On August 25, 2000, the final rule implementing Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Atlantic Bluefish Fishery (FMP) will be effective. This rule implements new permit and reporting requirements for commercial vessels, dealers, and party/charter boats; implements permit requirements for bluefish vessel operators; establishes a Bluefish Monitoring Committee charged with annually recommending to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission the total allowable landings and other restrictions necessary to achieve the target fishing mortality rates specified in the FMP; establishes a framework adjustment process; establishes a 9-year stock rebuilding schedule; establishes a commercial quota with state allocations; and establishes a recreational harvest limit. The purpose of this rule is to control fishing mortality of bluefish and rebuild the stock. This amendment and permits and measures described below do not apply to Gulf of Mexico bluefish.

New Permitting Requirements - Effective August 25, 2000

Commercial vessel permit

The new commercial vessel permit will replace the individual permit to sell bluefish. After 0001 hours, August 25, 2000, any vessel of the United States, including party and charter boats not carrying passengers for hire, that fishes for, possesses, or lands Atlantic bluefish (blue fish) in or from the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in excess of the recreational possession limit (currently 10 fish) must have been issued and carry on board a valid bluefish commercial vessel permit. Persons issued the bluefish vessel permit must sell only to federally-permitted dealers. If you have not already submitted an application for the bluefish vessel permit and want to apply, contact the NMFS Permit Office at 978-281-9370.

Party and charter boat permit

After 0001 hours, August 25, 2000, any party or charter boat must have been issued and carry on board a valid party or charter boat permit to fish for, possess, or land Atlantic bluefish in or from the EEZ if it is carrying passengers for hire. Persons on board such vessels must observe the possession limits. If you have not already submitted an application for the bluefish party and charter boat permit and wish to apply, contact the NMFS Permit Office at 978-281-9370.

Vessel operator permit

After 0001 hours, August 25, 2000, any operator of a vessel fishing for Atlantic bluefish, harvested in or from the EEZ, or issued a Federal vessel permit for bluefish, must have been issued and carry on board a valid Federal vessel operator's permit. An application for an operator permit may be obtained by contacting the NMFS Permit Office at 978-281-9370.

Dealer permit

After 0001 hours, August 25, 2000, Atlantic bluefish dealers must have been issued and have in their possession a valid Federal bluefish dealer permit in order to purchase fish from federally-permitted vessels. If you have not already submitted an application for the bluefish dealer permit and want to apply, contact the NMFS Permit Office at 978-281-9370.

New Reporting and Recordkeeping Requirements - Effective August 25, 2000

Vessel logbook reporting

After 0001 hours August 25, 2000, the owner or operator of any vessel issued a Federal bluefish permit, including party/charter vessels, must maintain on board the vessel, and submit, an accurate daily fishing log report for all fishing trips. The report must include all species fished for or taken, regardless if they were harvested in the EEZ or state waters, on forms supplied by or approved by the Regional Administrator. If authorized in writing by the Regional Administrator, a vessel owner or operator may submit reports electronically, for example by using a Vessel Monitoring System or other media. If no trips were made during a month, a report stating such must be submitted. Vessel log reports must be submitted monthly. Vessel logbooks are automatically sent to owners or operators who do not currently possess a vessel permit issued by the Northeast Region. Otherwise, a vessel logbook may be obtained by contacting the NMFS Statistics Office at 978-281-9246.

Dealer logbook reporting

After 0001 hours, August 25, 2000, federally-permitted bluefish dealers must submit to NMFS a detailed weekly report on forms supplied by or approved by the Regional Administrator of all fish purchases, regardless

where the fish were harvested in the EEZ or state waters. If no fish are purchased during a reporting week, no written report is required to be submitted. If no fish are purchased during an entire reporting month, a report so stating must be submitted on the required form. A dealer logbook may be obtained by contacting the NMFS Statistics Office at 978-281-9246.

Dealer Interactive Voice Response (IVR) reporting

After 0001 hours, August 25, 2000, federally-permitted bluefish dealers must file summary weekly reports of their bluefish purchases via the NMFS IVR system established for the purpose of monitoring dealer purchases. If no purchases of any IVR-monitored species were made during the week, a report so stating must be submitted through the IVR system. The toll-free telephone number for the IVR system is 1-888-284-4904.

Other Management Measures - Effective August 25, 2000

Recreational possession limit

Amendment 1 will continue to impose a daily possession limit, which is currently 10 fish.

State commercial quotas and closures

A commercial quota will be allocated to the states from Maine to the Florida east coast based on percentages contained in the FMP. The commercial bluefish fishery for a given state will be closed when its quota is projected to be taken. When a state is closed to the landing of bluefish, NMFS will issue a notice in the Federal Register to that effect and will notify all permit holders. State quotas for the 2000 fishing year could not be proposed until regulations became effective. A proposed rule will be published shortly to recommend Federal quotas for 2000. Acting under the authority of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, which manages bluefish jointly with the Council and NMFS, the states have implemented quotas consistent with those adopted by the Council and recommended to NMFS for 2000.